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Chairman:	Mr. Majoor	(Netherlands)
later:	Ms. Seanedzu (Vice-Chairman)	(Ghana)
later:	Mr. Majoor	(Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 56: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/63/38, 215 and 222)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/63/205, 214, 216 and 364)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/63/217)

1. **Ms. Belhadj** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on efforts to end obstetric fistula (A/63/222), said that obstetric fistula was a devastating childbirth injury usually suffered by poor, illiterate women and girls living in remote areas where gender inequality was pervasive and access to health care limited. It was the result of long, harrowing labour usually resulting in stillbirth.

2. While progress towards achieving the health-related Millennium Development Goals was generally slow, progress towards goal 5, on improving maternal health, was moving even more slowly. More than half a million women died in childbirth each year. Every minute, a woman in Africa or Asia died giving birth. For each woman who died in childbirth, at least 20 more were left injured or disabled. Obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal which left women leaking urine, faeces or both, was one of the most devastating injuries of childbearing. Its victims were often shunned by their communities and abandoned by their husbands and families. The injury pushed women further into poverty and misery, leaving them with few opportunities to earn a living and resulting in depression, anxiety and sometimes suicide.

3. Obstetric fistula had been virtually eliminated in industrialized nations. However, in Africa, Asia and the Arab region, over 2 million women were living with the condition, with some 50,000 to 100,000 new cases developing each year. Obstetric fistula was almost entirely preventable. Its continued existence was an indication that health systems were failing to meet the needs of women. The absence of preventive care was a violation of the human rights of women and girls.

4. As the report of the Secretary-General stated, much progress had been achieved over the past two decades in dealing with maternal death and disability and specifically with obstetric fistula, owing to stronger political will and financial commitments. However, intensified efforts at all levels, as well as predictable and sustained funding, were required to eradicate obstetric fistula. In 2003, UNFPA had launched the first global campaign to end fistula. Demonstrable results had been achieved. The campaign emphasized access to voluntary family-planning services, skilled birth attendance for all women during pregnancy and delivery, and emergency obstetric care for all women who developed complications. UNFPA also provided support for training medical personnel.

5. **Mr. Jeenbaev** (Kyrgyzstan) said that recent hearings in the Parliament on the subject of gender equality indicated that advances had been made. National law in the area was progressive, and gender provisions were contained in the Constitution, labour and family laws and a number of other pieces of legislation. Work to guarantee at least 30-per-cent representation of women in Government bodies at the decision-making level was ongoing, and laws on gender equality and protection against domestic violence had been adopted. However, unemployment among women in the Kyrgyz Republic was 8 per cent higher than among men, and women were concentrated in low-paying jobs. Their salaries and pensions were lower than those of men. Domestic violence still took place.

6. The number of women in senior ministerial positions had increased by 10 per cent in the previous year, reaching almost 50 per cent. The same trend was apparent in municipal and regional governments throughout the country. Women were also present in the executive branch of the national Government, in State committees, Government agencies and the Parliament, although in smaller numbers. While complete gender balance was yet to be achieved, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations bodies had acknowledged that Kyrgyzstan had achieved some successes in gender parity. Kyrgyzstan would shortly submit its third periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

7. **Ms. Banzon-Abalos** (Philippines) said that the food, financial and other crises presented a grave threat to the advancement of women. Seven out of ten of the world's hungry were women and girls, and women and children comprised a large proportion of those living on less than one dollar per day. Member States and the

international community should not take a "business-as-usual" approach, but should reassess their progress towards gender equality.

8. Important issues on the United Nations agenda such as climate change and human trafficking lacked a gender approach. On the latter issue, in particular, there was a tendency to examine the subject from a law-enforcement, criminal-justice or immigration perspective only. A gender-based approach was required, given that 80 per cent of the victims were women and girls. The principles contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should serve as guidelines in the crises currently facing the world.

9. **Mr. Motter** (Inter-Parliamentary Union) said that the representation of women in parliaments around the world was at an all-time high of 18 per cent. In the Rwandan National Assembly, 56 per cent of members were women, the first time ever that an elected national parliament had had a majority of women. More important, women parliamentarians in Rwanda had had an impact on policymaking and worked in partnership with men on gender-equality issues.

10. The Inter-Parliamentary Union had conducted a survey of men and women parliamentarians on the issue of women's participation within parliaments, an issue which had received less attention than that of women's access to parliaments. The survey had revealed that women changed how politics were practised and that their priorities were not the same as those of men. Women ardently supported women and had placed women's concerns on the parliamentary agenda, including provisions for parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender equality and combating gender-based violence.

11. Another key finding of the survey was that how many women there were in a parliament was significant. When the numbers of women were low, their ability to lobby, to participate in committee work and to change the gender dynamics in the chamber was limited. They had to spread themselves thin by assuming numerous committee assignments and taking on heavier workloads than men.

12. Gender sensitivity in the parliamentary environment was an issue. Spaces for women, such as specialized parliamentary committees and caucuses of women parliamentarians, were becoming more common. Some parliaments had become more family-friendly, organizing childcare facilities and instituting changes in sitting times.

13. Finally, participation by men was important in the development of gender-sensitive legislation, both because men formed the majority in parliaments and dominated leadership positions and also because their views needed to be included in such legislation. More attention should also be paid to promoting a gender-equality agenda within political parties, as they were arenas for policy development, debate and setting of priorities.

14. **Mr. Buff** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that sexual violence was one of the most frequent and greatest traumas suffered by women and girls in wartime. Sexual violence committed in connection with armed conflict was a war crime prohibited by international humanitarian law and must not be considered an unavoidable by-product of war. ICRC therefore welcomed Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), which demanded that all parties to armed conflict take immediate steps to cease and prevent crimes of sexual violence and prosecute those suspected of having committed them.

15. ICRC encouraged States to take measures to criminalize sexual violence in all its forms. It also reminded all parties to conflict that weapon bearers, be they members of Government armed forces, non-State armed groups or peacekeeping forces, must receive training and strict orders to refrain from and prevent crimes of sexual violence. That training must be translated into appropriate conduct.

16. The perpetrators of sexual violence must not go unpunished. Every single rape committed in connection with armed conflict constituted a war crime and should be prosecuted as such. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that perpetrators were held to account and punished. Vulnerability to sexual attack increased when potential perpetrators knew that victims faced difficulties in reporting crimes.

17. States and humanitarian actors were also urged to help potential victims avoid exposure to risk. To that end, facilities such as wells or fuel-efficient stoves should be provided close to home, so that women did not have to leave the safety of their villages as often to get water or fuel. Women should be involved in assessing assistance and protection needs and in programme implementation and monitoring. Communities should be made aware of the importance

of not rejecting and stigmatizing women and girl victims.

18. **Ms. Strauss** (International Organization for Migration) said that nearly 50 per cent of the world's migrants were now women. Some 800,000 people were trafficked across national borders each year, and women were particularly vulnerable. Because trafficking was a cross-border phenomenon, it must continue to be fought by means of bilateral, regional and multilateral partnerships.

19. One weapon in the fight against trafficking was technical cooperation and capacity development with governmental partners and civil society. It was important to evaluate and analyse current efforts with a view to continually improving actions taken. Accordingly, IOM had produced a Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking and a Handbook on Performance Indicators for Counter-Trafficking Projects.

20. IOM dealt with the problem of trafficking in the broader context of migration and believed there must be a comprehensive, rights-based approach to victims. However, cultural and language barriers could make it difficult for victims to invoke their rights and receive medical care, and their legal status in the destination country could subject them to detention and/or deportation instead of providing them with the services they urgently needed.

21. Trafficking generally followed broader migration patterns, making it difficult to distinguish the victims of trafficking from other migrants who have similar needs, and remained an under-documented form of violence against women and girls. There was often only a thin line between the definitions of trafficked persons, exploited migrants and smuggled migrants who might or might not be destined for exploitation. Those differences nevertheless had important implications for criminal proceedings and should also carry greater weight in the area of protection.

22. Identification as a victim of trafficking could allow safe accommodation, psycho-social support and other assistance whereas a migrant, especially someone who didn't fit the stereotype of a victim, was unlikely even to be screened for identification as such. That disproportionate response should not be based on such narrow distinctions; the response of the authorities should be based on the individual's degree of need. Accordingly, while accepting the need to improve victim identification, IOM believed that protection and assistance should be provided to all migrants in need. That would allow for an improved focus on responding to the specific situation and severity of exploitation of all migrants.

23. **Ms. Gastaldo** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) recalled that the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted at the 97th session of the International Labour Conference, in June 2008, stated for the first time that gender mainstreaming must be included in the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda. The Declaration complemented other ILO standards aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination in the world of work. In that context she noted that ILO Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation required only 14 more ratifications in order to enjoy universal application within ILO.

24. Implementation, however, required continuous attention and proactive measures. The report *Global Employment Trends for Women 2008* showed that gender gaps had not narrowed substantially. The share of women in vulnerable employment, either unpaid family workers or own-account workers, had decreased about 5 per cent since 1997. Moving from such employment into wage and salaried work could be a major step towards economic freedom for many women, and access to decent and productive employment was crucial to creating greater equality between men and women. Societies were increasingly aware of the potential of women's labour to reduce poverty and were searching for innovative ways to lower economic, social and political barriers. The pace of change remained sluggish, however; significant disparities remained and most regions had a long way to go to take full advantage of women's untapped economic potential. The general discussion of the 98th session of the Conference, in 2009, would therefore focus on gender equality and decent work. In preparation for the Conference, ILO had launched a campaign aimed at increasing awareness of gender equality.

25. ILO devoted special attention to women and girls who were the victims of trafficking and who represented 98 per cent of those trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Since more women than men ended up in abusive and exploitative situations, anti-trafficking measures should be gender-

responsive and address trafficking as a development issue at the national and local levels. ILO, in collaboration with other United Nations entities, had recently published a background paper on migration, gender equality and development to stimulate reflection on the gender aspect of migration prior to the Second Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development in Milan in October 2008.

26. The ILO International Training Centre provided training and capacity-building on the elimination of all forms of discrimination to a wide range of actors and, in cooperation with the European Commission, was implementing a major pilot project to increase companies' awareness of gender issues and the need to combat gender stereotypes. In keeping with its commitment to the promotion of gender equality, ILO itself was working to achieve the target of 50 per cent representation of women in professional posts by 2010; the Action Plan for Gender Equality was aimed at achieving that goal.

27. **Mr. Seth** (India) said that the recent high-level event or Millennium Development Goals had revealed that despite progress the gender gap remained considerable and the full potential of women remained untapped, owing largely to lack of resources at the international level and lack of political will at the domestic level. Women continued to be underrepresented within the United Nations system itself, in particular at senior and policymaking levels and the objective of 50/50 gender distribution was far from being met. If a cosmopolitan organization like the United Nations had difficulty implementing equal representation for women it was not surprising that States, with their specific cultures and circumstances, were lagging behind.

28. The political, educational, economic and legal empowerment of women was a major objective of his Government. The Department responsible for women's affairs had been made a Ministry in 2005, the eleventh national five-year plan 2007-2012 had for the first time shifted focus from mere empowerment of women to recognizing women as agents of socio-economic growth, making gender a cross-cutting theme. The Plan also guaranteed the rights and entitlements of women and acknowledged the differences among women according to their location, caste, community, religion and development zone.

29. Political empowerment was a prerequisite for progress on women's issues. Accordingly, one third of urban and local government seats were reserved for women, thereby giving more than one million women social and political empowerment at the grass-roots level. A similar requirement was planned for the national Parliament. The national Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women provided independent monitoring of the equality and empowerment of women and ensured legislation was gender responsive.

30. Programmes had been implemented to improve the socio-economic empowerment of women. Self-help groups provided vocational training to women and encouraged entrepreneurship by providing easy credit facilities; in order to facilitate employment, women working away from home could use working women's hostels with day-care services; and the Act on Social Security for Workers, including women, was being implemented in the unorganized sector. The National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, launched in 2006, which guaranteed 100 days of employment per year to every rural household, required at least one third of beneficiaries to be women; the actual figure was more like one half. Progress was likewise being made towards reducing female poverty by half by 2015.

31. His delegation supported the goal of equal rights for men and women everywhere and would continue to contribute to the Organization's efforts to reach out to such vulnerable groups as women and children, particularly in conflict and post-conflict societies. The international community must likewise support those societies by increasing resources available, transferring technology, sharing experience and information, and promoting capacity-building.

32. **Mr. Cherkaoui** (Morocco) said women were the main victims of armed conflict and paid tribute to the women victims in armed conflicts, including Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to their contribution to development and the consolidation of democracy. No culture was free of the scourge of violence against women, and globalization helped the spread of networks whose activities violated women's rights. The only solution was full integration of women into political life, equality of opportunity for economic and social development, the rule of law and action by the United Nations. He commended the Organization and the Division for the Advancement of Women for their

efforts and pledged his Government's continued cooperation with the regional bureau of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), for example with regard to the Cisco Systems project to increase women's access to information technologies.

33. He welcomed progress made towards combating trafficking of women and girls and endorsed the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (A/63/222), in particular with regard to Millennium Development Goal 5, on improving maternal health. While progress had been made in Africa to improve maternity care, women and girls continued to be disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and had little control over their risk of exposure to that disease. More resources must therefore be mobilized to improve health-care systems so that women could enjoy the benefits of adequate family planning, which was the basis for health care in Morocco. Civil society must likewise take a comprehensive and integrated approach to meeting the needs of women. That included eliminating forced marriages, improving their educational levels and employment prospects, and providing them with counselling services, literacy training and health education. The contribution women could make to peace, democracy and human rights must be recognized.

34. Moroccan women had always played a prominent role in the political life and socio-economic development of the country. There were currently 34 women in Parliament and 7 women Ministers in the Government. In 2006 the Family Code had been amended, and in 2007 the Nationality Code had been amended to enable Moroccan women who were married to a foreign citizen to pass on their citizenship to their children. Men and women were considered to be equals, spouses had joint responsibility for the family, a woman could marry without the consent of her father or guardian, the age for marriage was 18 for both men and women and divorce could be granted by a judge if both spouses consented. The Criminal Code had been amended to criminalize trafficking, prostitution, pornography and sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination.

35. His Government was committed to harmonizing its domestic legislation with international instruments and had withdrawn its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was also preparing draft laws on violence against women and on the legal age for employment as a domestic worker. Other planned measures, of a more practical and concrete nature, included for example the establishment of a toll-free telephone line for women and girl victims of violence.

36. His Government had long included gender issues in its budget process, with appreciable effects for the target groups, in particular in rural areas. In 2006 a gender dimension had been incorporated into all public policies in keeping with his Government's firm commitment to a people-centred development strategy. He stressed that all efforts to empower women must be integrated into a comprehensive and democratic process that took into account the gender-specific aspects of social, educational and economic policies, and said that any attempt to violate the fundamental rights of women must be vigorously opposed.

37. **Ms. Wong** (Singapore) reaffirmed her delegation's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, many of which affected the advancement of women. In Singapore — a society that held dear the ideal of merit — boys and girls, regardless of social background, had equal opportunities to excel in education and the workplace. Government schools provided excellent education, charged minimal fees and admitted students on the basis of merit; half of university students were women. In a competitive world where talent was a valued resource, and in recognition of the effect better education for women in particular had on socio-economic indicators, her Government invested heavily in preparing every individual to contribute to Singapore and the world. As an example of equality of opportunity, she noted that in 2006 as many girls as boys had been granted public undergraduate scholarships, even though only 47 per cent of applicants were girls.

38. Women represented 43 per cent of the workforce and their right to equal remuneration was recognized. Singapore had ratified ILO Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and had issued a Tripartite Declaration on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Performing Work of Equal Value, according to which employers and trade unions were requested to include an equal-remuneration clause in contracts and collective agreements. The Ministry of Manpower and the National Trade Union Congress had

developed guidelines to ensure recruitment and promotion solely on the basis of merit. Hundreds of companies, ministries and statutory boards had pledged to honour those guidelines.

39. Women enjoyed the same human rights as men. They were encouraged to run for public office and were increasingly well represented in leadership positions in the public and private sectors as well as international organizations. Stakeholders, including women, were consulted on policies affecting them. Gender-specific policies, for example, assisted elderly women and helped working women manage work and personal commitments. With greater financial independence, women were choosing to marry later; in an attempt to arrest the downward trend in fertility rates, her Government had increased maternity leave to 16 weeks and a works fund had been created to promote family-friendly working arrangements.

40. Her Government believed that men and women should share responsibilities in society. An association of family men had been established to raise awareness of men's role and responsibilities in society, and complemented the work of a centre for fathering set up to champion responsible fatherhood. Male civil servants were entitled to paid leave to care for sick children, and the Ministry of Education allowed husbands to apply for flexi-work schemes. Such measures sent a strong signal that all must play their part for the good of society.

41. Singapore was committed to the empowerment of women and had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women at an early date. The Constitution, the Penal Code and the Women's Charter protected women against violence. With regard to health, she said that prevention and screening services for common women-related diseases were accessible and affordable for most women.

42. In conclusion, she emphasized the importance of literacy for women, which was crucial to family health and education and to the advancement of women.

43. **Ms. Seanedzu** (Ghana) said that the Government of Ghana had put the necessary mechanisms in place to promote the advancement of women and ensure the protection of their human rights in conformity with the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Women's participation in decision-making at all levels was being enhanced and gender perspectives incorporated into development policies, programmes and plans. A national directory of women in decision-making had been launched.

44. The Government was enhancing legal and policy frameworks in its comprehensive approach to eliminating all forms of violence against women. The Parliament had passed the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 and victim-support units had been set up within the police service. A domestic-violence policy and comprehensive national plan of action had been finalized, a domestic-violence secretariat had been set up and the Minister for Women and Children was chairing the domestic-violence management board. Gender-training programmes were under way in law-enforcement agencies.

45. Trafficking in persons was growing despite the adoption of the landmark United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Ghana was ensuring that effective counter-trafficking mechanisms were in place and had passed the Human Trafficking Act in 2005.

46. The lack of resources was a key obstacle to implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as other agreed development goals. Ghana had introduced gender-responsive budgeting into its 2009 budget guidelines, and strategies were in place for collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the National Development Planning Commission to enhance public-sector capacities. Increased financial inflows from bilateral and multilateral sources would accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

47. The Third High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness had been held in Ghana in 2008, following the Accra International Women's Forum. The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development and the review of the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus offered further opportunities to explore the gender implications of financing for development.

48. **Mr. Borg** (Malta) said that his Government was committed to the advancement of women in all spheres of life so that men and women could have a true partnership with shared responsibilities. While the statement delivered by France on behalf of States

members of the European Union generally reflected Malta's views, he wished to clarify his Government's position regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights. Maltese legislation did not recognize abortion as a measure of family planning and considered the termination of pregnancy through induced-abortion procedures to be illegal. Malta had consistently expressed its reservations concerning the use of such terms as "reproductive rights", "reproductive services" and "control of fertility" in international programmes and instruments. A number of the reports circulated by the Secretary-General contained references to "sexual and reproductive rights" and "reproductive health services" which Malta found difficult to accept. Malta maintained that any position taken or recommendations made regarding women's empowerment and gender equality should not in any way create an obligation on any party to consider abortion a legitimate form of reproductive health rights, services or commodities. That position should be taken into account when preparing similar reports in the future.

49. His country's commitment to gender equality was reflected in legal enforcement and procedural measures. Such measures included guidelines for radio and television broadcasts, a legislative amendment prohibiting sexual discrimination and harassment, a framework for combating gender discrimination in the access to and supply of goods and services, amendments to trafficking legislation, courses for women in information and communications technologies, and support for female entrepreneurship. The Government was continuing its efforts to mainstream gender equality in all sectors of society and integrate a gender perspective in all Government policies, laws and projects.

50. **Ms. Mahamadou Barade** (Niger) said that her Government was making efforts to ensure that women benefited equally from economic and social progress. Gender was a priority in all programmes, especially in the poverty-reduction strategy, and the budget for the advancement of women had increased by 40 per cent in real terms in the past three years.

51. National efforts, together with assistance from development partners, had achieved notable results. The primary enrolment rate for girls had improved significantly. There was free provision of breast-cancer screening and treatment, Caesarean sections and fibroid removal. Infant mortality had been reduced, and activities for HIV/AIDS prevention, immunization "plus", and fighting malaria were under way. Provisions to counter violence against women had been added to the Penal Code in 2004 and a law on quotas had improved women's representation in Government.

52. Credit lines had been made available to women in all regions and funds had also been distributed for farming activities. The Government had created a women's bank and a social and vocational centre that provided income-generating activities and credit for women recovering from obstetric fistula.

53. Further progress was needed in a number of areas, including women's representation at decision-making levels, income-generating activities, easing of the domestic burden of rural women and capacity-building for agencies responsible for the advancement of women. A national gender policy would be implemented to address women's social, legal, political and economic advancement.

54. *Ms. Seanedzu (Ghana), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

55. **Ms. Salicioni** (San Marino) said that favourable legislation and economic conditions eased the path to gender equality for women in San Marino. Women were well represented at all levels and one of the two Heads of State (Captains Regent) and two cabinet ministers were women. Legislation on maternity protection had led to a considerable increase in the numbers of working women, who accounted for over 40 per cent of the workforce. Significant numbers of women held medium- and high-ranking positions in both the public and private sectors.

56. Violence against women and girls was the most widespread violation of human rights. The San Marino Permanent Mission had organized an event in June 2008 in an effort to stop violence against women and strongly supported the United Nations campaign to end violence against women. It had also carried out a national campaign and the Parliament had recently adopted an innovative law on the prevention and punishment of violence against women.

57. **Ms. Changtrakul** (Thailand) said that the Thai Government had implemented a medium-term plan of action to promote opportunities for women and protect their rights, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the current midterm review of the MDGs, Member States should give attention to the gender

perspective of the targets. Thailand had already eliminated the disparity between boys and girls in primary and secondary education and was now working to do the same in tertiary education. Thailand had made every effort to provide universal health care and regular checkups for rural mothers, and had succeeded in reducing maternal mortality and mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Economic mechanisms to support rural women included a progressive land tax, incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises, microcredit facilities and temporary debt suspension for farmers.

58. Legal measures to eliminate violence against women had been strengthened. Thailand was committed to implementing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The subject of domestic violence had been addressed in the Protection of Domestic Violence Victims Act 2007.

59. The Government had made significant progress in preventing and fighting trafficking in persons, particularly women and children, through all-round cooperation. Rehabilitation centres had been established for both Thai and foreign victims, including illegal migrants, and medical care was also provided.

60. Thailand had made significant progress in gender mainstreaming from grass-roots to policymaking levels. In addition to creating a special office on women's affairs, the Government had set up gender focal points in all ministries and provincial administrations. In view of women's crucial role in shaping the future generation at home as well as in economic development, eliminating discrimination against women would contribute both to the economy and to society.

61. **Ms. Tiendrébéogo** (Burkina Faso) said that her Government was implementing an action plan for 2006-2010 for women's advancement, and activities were carried out in collaboration with civil society and technical and financial partners. Services were provided for women victims of violence and there were information, training and advocacy efforts in relation to women's rights. Manuals on women's rights had been issued and copies of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been distributed in French and in local languages. A number of events had been held to celebrate the twenty-eighth anniversary of the Convention.

62. Burkina Faso's sixth report on implementation of the Convention described the policies and programmes that were contributing to eliminating discrimination against women. The Government had created a national commission to provide a framework for the protection of women's rights. The Commission was responsible for monitoring all national commitments relating to women and for launching initiatives to raise the awareness of decision-makers and the general public.

63. Burkina Faso was implementing the recommendations in the Secretary-General's study *Ending violence against women: From words to action* and was one of ten countries participating in the pilot programme of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. The Ministry for Basic Education and Mass Literacy and the Ministry for the Advancement of Women had established a network of literacy and training centres to remedy the high rate of illiteracy among women. A national forum for women was planned for November 2008.

64. The constraints of sociocultural problems and the lack of resources would have to be resolved if real progress was to be made. The Government's national gender policy would soon provide a framework for development issues.

65. **Ms. Makhumula** (Malawi) said that her country had focused on placing women at the centre of development, a stance that had been reaffirmed at the recent High-level Meeting on Africa's Development Needs. Over 70 per cent of agricultural work in Malawi was done by women; empowering them would also help reduce poverty. Malawi had worked to promote the issue at the Africa Green Revolution Conference in Oslo. The President of the Republic was one of 100 Torch Bearers for the Global MDG 3 Campaign. The national MDG 3 Torch Campaign would be launched the following day, on 15 October.

66. Malawi had recently submitted its sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A new Department of Civic Education had been established under the Ministry of Information in order to disseminate the Convention and other relevant instruments, and the Government continued to organize media campaigns on the topic.

67. Malawi was fully committed to ending violence against women. It had signed the South African Development Community Declaration on Gender and Development and put in place numerous laws and strategies, including the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 2006 and the National Response to Gender-Based Violence, 2008-2011.

68. Political and corporate representation of women remained low, and there were contradictions between customary laws, national laws and international commitments. The Government had put in place a programme aimed at achieving 50-per-cent representation of women in the 2009 parliamentary elections.

69. She reiterated Malawi's commitment to all the agreed goals on women, and looked forward to increased international cooperation.

70. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that her country was party to several relevant international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol. A basic law enshrined gender equality at all levels, and a national gender policy had been established in January 2008. Staff and resources had been mobilized to prevent the feminization of poverty and empower women.

71. The victims of sexual violence in the Congo were overwhelmingly women and girls; the average victim was under 14 years old. That unacceptable human-rights violation also had a serious impact in health and labour terms. Most victims did not come forward, either out of shame or because they were unaware of the available legal mechanisms. The problem was a priority for the Government. Legislative provisions were being strengthened, officials trained, and campaigns organized to raise awareness among men. A national observatory and a network of concerned non-governmental organizations had been put in place.

72. A "road map" had been formulated to reduce maternal mortality, which currently averaged 780 deaths per 100,000 live births. With regard to obstetric fistula, two studies had gathered quantitative and qualitative information. With UNFPA support, the Government was providing for the socio-economic reintegration of the victims.

73. The Congo would welcome a permanent framework for dialogue and exchange of ideas on gender issues at the United Nations level. The Government was incorporating the gender dimension into its strategies on poverty reduction and AIDS prevention, but continued to face sociocultural prejudice.

74. *Mr. Majoor (Netherlands) resumed the Chair.*

75. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) said that despite recent progress, women continued to face multiple challenges. International cooperation, official development assistance, debt relief and the opening of markets were all essential to achieving internationally agreed development goals. The Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, in particular, required greater contributions.

76. In accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the plight of women in conflict situations and under foreign occupation deserved attention. In particular, Israel as an occupying Power should be held accountable for its human-rights violations.

77. Lebanon was taking action for gender mainstreaming and the advancement of women. The Ministries of Social Affairs and Labour were examining the issues of domestic violence and the situation of immigrant domestic workers respectively. Funding was being allocated for women to establish small enterprises. Rural women accounted for 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force; the Government sought to include them in development policies and to address their reproductive needs.

78. Following the 2006 Israeli war against Lebanon and pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the National Commission for Lebanese Women had launched a project in cooperation with UNFPA on the topic of women, peace and security. Another project, supported by UNIFEM, was aimed inter alia at establishing a comprehensive database on women's issues.

79. The Government was also reforming legislation on honour crimes and human trafficking, and was building new hospitals and health-care centres. The new National Action Plan for Education for All provided for interim affirmative action to bridge the gender gap.

80. **Mr. Nayasi** (Fiji) said that climate change and the financial, food and energy crises endangered the realization of MDG 3 and related goals. It was

essential to take a multilateral approach and to include a gender dimension in the response.

81. In Fiji, the Department for Women had recently been merged with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. A women's plan of action had also been established in order to realize gender mainstreaming in all Government actions. It included, inter alia, a gender-budgeting strategy and gender audits. However, Fiji needed support in order to face such challenges. He therefore urged United Nations entities, funding agencies and development partners to provide assistance.

82. **Ms. Halabi** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, acting on its international obligations and religious and cultural heritage, the Syrian Arab Republic had drafted its second national report on actions taken to realize the objectives of the Beijing Conference, including efforts for the empowerment of women. The current five-year plan (2005-2010) had narrowed the gender gap in several areas, including education and parliamentary representation. A forum of Syrian and Turkish businesswomen had been organized in order to encourage trade and industrial investment. The budget promoted gender equality by allocating funds to the National Women's Union. The Ministry of Education was revising curricula to reflect a more contemporary image of women.

83. In the Syrian Arab Golan, some Syrian women continued to live under Israeli occupation, while others had left the area. The Government provided such women with assistance and facilitated their access to Syrian universities. It also continued to pay the salaries of teachers and school employees who had been dismissed by the occupying Power.

84. The international community needed to fulfil its obligations towards women under Israeli occupation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the Occupied Syrian Golan, many of whom remained in prison. Given the threat of Israeli aggression, the Syrian defence budget absorbed funds that could otherwise have been spent on development for the benefit of Arab women.

85. **Mr. Monterrey Suay** (El Salvador) said that El Salvador had reached gender parity in primary education, and more girls than boys were enrolled in secondary and higher education. The focus of technical training had been shifted away from traditionally female subjects so as to enable women to move up the social ladder and hold managerial and administrative jobs, as well as jobs in public and Government service. Women participated actively in politics, and during the 2005-2009 term, 30 per cent of elective positions were held by women.

86. The Government attached high priority to issues such as domestic violence, trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the feminization of HIV/AIDS. It was working to improve economic opportunities for women so that they could truly participate in decision-making, have access to resources and be empowered. El Salvador was making every effort to meet its international commitments, including the Millennium Development Goals. His Government urged the Secretary-General to continue strengthening the role of the United Nations Institute for Research and Training for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

87. **Mr. Muita** (Kenya) said that Kenya had made significant progress in the empowerment of women, including through their involvement in high-level decision-making. The admission rate of women in institutions of higher learning was almost on a par with that of men, and at least 30 per cent of all appointments, recruitments and promotions in the public sector were reserved for women.

88. The phenomenon of trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, had been increasing exponentially, notwithstanding the efforts of the international community. The African Heads of State and Government, meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh in July 2008, had proposed that discussions should be held on a global plan of action to address the multifaceted dimension of human trafficking. Countries must work together, share best practices and combat trafficking in all its manifestations. Africa continued to suffer disproportionately, as many women and girls were smuggled to lucrative markets in the north. Kenya was both a source and a transit point of trafficked women and girls.

89. Such crimes as sexual abuse, physical abuse or acts that instilled fear in women or humiliated them must not be allowed to continue. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendation for countries to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session. It also supported the campaign against violence led by the Secretary-General and by

UNIFEM. In Kenya, the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act, the establishment of women's desks in police stations and the anti-violence campaigns had left an indelible mark on the protection of women against violence. More partnerships were needed to replicate those ideas in all parts of the country.

90. Africa was lagging behind in the quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including goal 3. His delegation urged members to support UNFPA so as to enable it to continue its good work. In Kenya, the efforts of the National Commission on Gender and Development and measures such as the appointment of gender officers in all the ministries were bearing fruit. The National Assembly currently had 19 women members, the highest number since independence.

91. His delegation attached great importance to the efforts to reform the United Nations and the gender architecture in particular. So far, the action did not match the rhetoric. A large proportion of women continued to live in abject poverty and poor health. They continued to face discrimination, violence and abuse and undergo shocking cultural rites. It was essential to seal the gap between policy and implementation.

92. **Mr. Nhleko** (Swaziland) said that his country had acceded to most international instruments on the advancement of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Swaziland was also a party to most regional and subregional protocols on the advancement of women and was a signatory to the Protocol on Gender and Development of the Southern African Development Community. The Constitution guaranteed the rights and freedoms of women and provided that women had the right to equal treatment and equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities. A campaign had been conducted to elect more women to political office. A gender-coordination unit was responsible for facilitating gender mainstreaming in all areas of development, and gender and development issues were included in the country's national development strategy.

93. Noting that maternal health was the area of least progress in international efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals, he stressed the need for intensified efforts to end obstetric fistula. His Government acknowledged with appreciation the work of UNFPA in supporting national and regional efforts to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. Recognizing the contribution of rural women to development, his Government had designed a number to programmes to facilitate projects initiated by rural women, including microcredit financing.

94. Swaziland condemned all forms of violence against women, and legislation to address domestic and sexual violence would soon be passed by the Parliament. It supported the Secretary-General for his leadership in the campaign on that issue.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.